LAND USE

Historical

Even though the French laid claim to the area as early as 1682, Native Americans of the Missouri, Osage, Fox, and Sac tribes were in undisputed possession of northern Missouri until the United States took ownership in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Beginning in 1804, Native Americans made a series of treaties that eventually relinquished their claims to land in Missouri.

Current boundaries for Marion and Shelby counties were established in 1825 and 1835. Agriculture quickly became the area's economic base with the arrival of whites settlers following the War of 1812. These settlers, mostly from Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio, caused rapid population growth in the region until the early 1900's. With the exception of Marion County, the human population began to decline around 1920. For example, the population of Shelby County from 1900 to 1997 fell from 16,167 to 6,818. The population of Marion County has remained relatively stable due to its proximity to the Mississippi River.

Much of the presettlement landscape in the upper portion of the North River basin was prairie (Schroeder 1982). In fact, over half the land in Shelby County was prairie. In the lower portion of the basin, largely Marion County, most land was timbered and only about 24% was prairie. Both prairie and forest diminished rapidly with the commencement of land clearing for both row crops and livestock grazing.

Current Land Use

Estimates of current land cover/use were provided by MORAP (unpublished 1999). Approximately 77% of the land in the watershed is used for agricultural purposes (Figure lu). Approximately 117,730 acres (48%) are cultivated for crops, and another 69,195 acres (28%) are in pasture/grassland. Only about 21% of the basin is forested.

County crop production reports for Marion and Shelby counties indicate that soybeans are the most important field crop in terms of acres planted and harvested (Sallee et al. 1996). Wheat and corn rank second and third. Annual livestock production in these two counties combined was 57,300 head of cattle and 124,900 hogs. Shelby County is among Missouri's top swine producing counties.

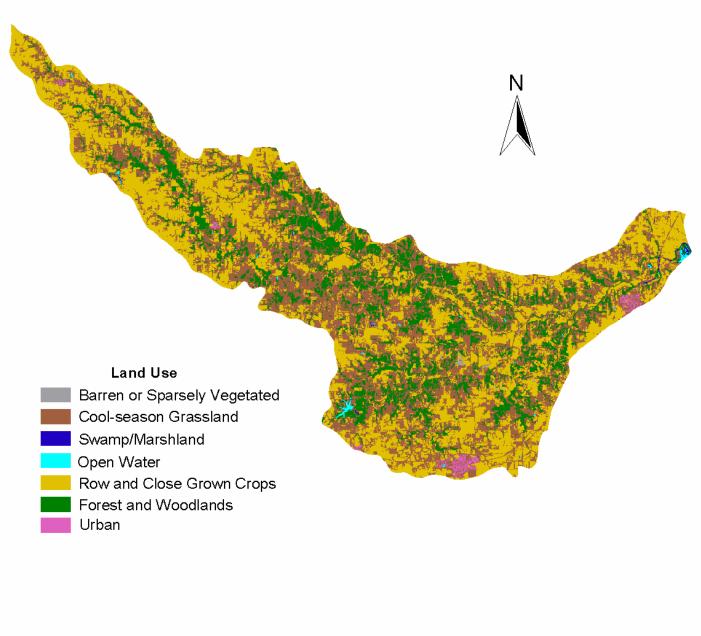




Figure lu. Land use in the North River Watershed, in Missouri.